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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KS](#) [KN](#)  
SUBJECT: FORMER PRESIDENT KIM YOUNG-SAM: LOOKING FORWARD TO  
LEE MYUNG-BAK PRESIDENCY

Classified By: AMB. Alexander Vershbow. Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a June 26 luncheon meeting with the Ambassador, former President Kim Young-sam (KYS) said that the next ROK president would be a conservative from the Grand National Party, either former Seoul Mayor Lee Myung-bak or former GNP Chairperson Park Geun-hye. Kim believed that Lee, his own preference, would continue to lead Park in the polls and become the GNP nominee. KYS was also strongly of the view that the ruling camp could not field a viable candidate due to President Roh Moo-hyun's lack of public support. Koreans did not want to see "another disaster." KYS was especially scathing in assessing the current government's North Korea policy, which he characterized as "revisionist." Because of such "confused thinking" from the Blue House, many young Koreans did not know who started the Korean War. KYS believed that the most important task for the new conservative president was to reaffirm the paramount importance of the U.S.-ROK alliance. KYS was also interested in the status of the Six Party Talks and urged the U.S. not to move too fast. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Former President Kim Young-sam, now an octogenarian, showed none of the wear and tear from his 55 years in politics, most of them spent in opposition. Looking fit and trim, hair died jet black, KYS discussed politics, North Korea, and himself for over two hours during a June 26 luncheon hosted by the Ambassador. As always, he was frank and upfront in delivering his views.

Lee Myung-bak Will Win  
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¶3. (C) Characterizing former Seoul Mayor Lee Myung-bak as someone with deep business and management experience, KYS said that he fully expected Lee would win the GNP nomination and go on to be the next president. Opinion polls were very accurate, Kim said. KYS himself had consistently led his rival, Kim Dae-jung, in the 1992 race and went on to win by a 7-percent margin, the largest ever in Korean history. True, Lee had stumbled somewhat in the last few weeks and had been hurt by mud-slinging by the government and his GNP opponents, causing some narrowing in his lead over Park Geun-hye; but, KYS predicted, the former Seoul Mayor would prevail. KYS assessed that Lee had been hurt by his cross-country canal proposal, which has been attacked as an ill-designed, uneconomical project, and he had recommended that Lee downplay it.

14. (C) KYS had little to say on Park Geun-hye's candidacy except to note that her father was Park Chung-hee, a dictator whom he had fought for most of his political life. Park Chung-hee's assassination, KYS said, took place two months after the Pusan-Masan demonstrations in 1979, which were triggered through KYS's leadership.

Ruling Camp: No Hope  
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15. (C) Kim said that there was no chance that a ruling party candidate could win the presidency. None of the candidates, including Chung Dong-young, Lee Hae-chan, Han Myung-sook and Kim Hyuk-kyu, registered more than couple of percent in the polls. How could they possibly win? Kim also dismissed former Gyeonggi Governor Sohn Hak-kyu's prospects. Sohn had bolted from the GNP because he had no support within the party. Such desertions never paid off. Sohn would not find support in the ruling camp either, Kim assessed.

16. (C) Fundamentally, KYS said, the ruling camp had to carry Roh Moo-hyun, a failed president. Koreans no longer wanted Roh's brand of progressive politics; they had tried it and didn't like it. While the ruling camp would try desperately to win votes through maneuvers such as a North-South summit, Korean voters would see through them. In any case, KYS said, there was no reason for Kim Jong-il to accept a summit, because Roh could not pay for it, unlike Kim Dae-jung who "bought" the 2000 summit for USD 500 million, which, in turn, came from Hyundai Corp.

17. (C) Ten years of progressive rule, starting with the election of Kim Dae-jung in 1997, had resulted in enormous damage, KYS said. South Koreans were letting their guard

down against the communist threat from North Korea. Recent polls showed that most young people did not know who started the Korean War. This was not surprising in view of Unification Minister Lee Jae-jung's wishy-washy response to the question from the National Assembly on which side started the war.

18. (C) The next South Korean president must return to the basics, KYS said. The next government must recognize the paramount importance of the U.S.-ROK alliance, without which all of Korea would now be under communist rule. The next president must also repair the damaged relationship with Japan, which remained a key partner for both the United States and the ROK. In regard to China, KYS thought that its current influence and potential were exaggerated. China still had enormous problems ahead because of its one-party rule. China must modernize its political system if it was play a greater role in the region and beyond. Taiwan, on the other hand, looked like a prosperous and vibrant democracy. Invited by President Chen Shui-bian, KYS was planning on visiting Taipei in the coming months.

Six Party Talks  
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19. (C) Noting that there had been considerable developments in the Six Party Talks, KYS questioned whether the U.S. was moving too fast. The Ambassador assured Kim that the negotiations were being conducted cautiously and deliberately and that Washington would not normalize relations with North Korea until it had completely and verifiably denuclearized.

Comment  
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110. (C) These are retirement years for Kim Young-sam, a fixture in South Korean politics since the liberation until the end of his presidency in 1998. While still popular in his home town of Busan, KYS no longer has much of a role, especially as his presidency ended under the dark cloud of the financial crisis. This diminished role quite clearly irks KYS, because his long-time nemesis Kim Dae-jung remains

very much in the game, capable of delivering a large chunk of votes from the southwest Jeolla region. Still, KYS took enormous pleasure in pointing out to the Ambassador that key politicians, such as Lee Myung-bak and Sohn Hak-kyu, came to see him to get his advice and blessing.

VERSHBOW